

Southern U.S. Hit By Heavy Snows; Motorists Stymied

15-Inch Covering 'Cuts Off' Macon

By Herald-Tribune Wire Services

The South's worst snowstorm of the century dumped a foot or more snow throughout the land of cotton and magnolias Saturday, isolating towns and stranding thousands of motorists.

Macon, Ga., was virtually cut off from the outside world by a 15-inch covering. The same plight troubled Columbus, Ga., and Phenix City, Ala., on the Georgia-Alabama border.

Georgia National Guardsmen helped rescue efforts, armories provided emergency shelter and state patrol joined National Guard spotter planes in trying to locate stranded motorists.

Interstate 75, one of the main East Coast arteries feeding into Florida, was closed to southbound travel from a point 30 miles south of Atlanta to within about 20 miles of the Florida line — a stretch of about 200 miles.

State troopers reported thousands of stranded cars — "along I-75. One officer estimated the pileup covered over 50 miles.

Interstate 20 also was reported impassable and jammed with stranded cars in the Augusta area, about 150 miles east of Atlanta. Atlanta was spared the storm, but 12 inches fell on Augusta.

The snowstorm, forming when a blast of northern air converged with the warm, moist air flow of the Gulf of Mexico, rolled rapidly out of Louisiana Friday night and whipped through Mississippi, Alabama, northern Florida, Georgia and into the Carolinas.

Three inches of snow piled up along the Mississippi Gulf Coast during the morning and most major highways in South Alabama were closed. Sunshine melted away much of the unusual snowfall by mid-day, however, and officials in many sectors said conditions had returned to near normal by late Saturday.

For communities like Phenix City, Ala., and Columbus, Ga., however, no immediate relief was in sight. Columbus Mayor J. R. Allen observed that "this is probably what you would call a once-in-a-hundred years snow," and records of the National Weather Service supported this.

Snowbound motorists waited in countless motels, hotels and some national guard armories Saturday as work crews in paralyzed central Georgia struggled to open roads.

Freezing rain changed to snow Friday and iced roads and bridges before dumping as much as 15 inches of accumulation over more than 25,000 square miles from Columbus to Augusta.

More than 1,000 travelers were taken to lodgings and national guard armories around the middle Georgia area after the guardsmen's four-wheel drive trucks and jeeps rescued them from impassable roads.

Mrs. Robert Smith, of Aurora, Ill., was traveling to Paris Island, S.C., for her Marine son's graduation when the car became stalled in a massive traffic tie-up south of Atlanta on I-75 near Forsyth.

"The guardsmen's truck took me and my two daughters to an armory to use the rest room and when they brought us back state troopers told us they made my husband and other cars drive back north," she said.

More than 60 persons spent Saturday mostly sleeping and playing cards in the Thomaston armory awaiting word that roads were cleared. Motels and hotels in central Georgia were packed as motorists sought available rooms.

"I'm not used to weather this bad because we have machinery to clear roads off 15 minutes after snow falls," said Rudy Anastus, of Detroit, Mich. Anastus and his wife were snowbound in a motel at Forsyth after leaving Florida for their home.

"They don't expect this kind of weather and aren't prepared for it," he said. "They don't have any shovels and then they get panicky and excited."

Up to 10 inches of snow fell in the midlands and southern portions of South Carolina and on south coastal cities in North Carolina. The weather bureau at Columbia, S.C. said it was the heaviest snowfall in that area during a 24-hour period since the bureau began keeping records.

Snow was reported as far south as Hudson, Fla., 40 miles north of Tampa. A half-inch of snow was reported in Lake City, west of Jacksonville, but the Florida Panhandle reported only a trace.

Some Jacksonville residents incredulously called newspaper offices and asked: "Is that stuff really snow?"

A Jacksonville automobile dealer posted a sign offering: "Today only — free snow sleds with purchase of a new car."

The snow in Jacksonville did not remain on the ground, but it was visible on the hoods of some cars.

Longtime Tallahassee residents noted that the last real snow was Feb. 13, 1958.

"This one is about two days early," remarked Malcolm (Continued on Page 4A, Col. 1)



Bundled-Up Columbia, S.C., Shopper . . . braves chill winds and snowdrifts

Brrr! We Probably Hit A Record Low

By JON DIETZ
Herald-Tribune Staff Writer

Winter visitors from north of the Mason-Dixon line were probably wondering why they bothered to come to the Sarasota-Manatee area. If they wanted to freeze to death, they might as well have stayed home!

Near record freezing temperatures were reported in the area over the weekend, and residents of the Casey Key Marina area even reported few snowflakes fell between 6 and 8 p.m. on Blackpoint Road.

On Feb. 11, 1957, the temperature in Sarasota dipped (Continued On Page 4A, Col. 1)

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Johnson, editor of the Tallahassee Democrat.

Children did much of their playing in parking lots, where auto fenders and windshields made handy snow collectors. Some Florida State University students made small snowmen.

As the front crossed the state trailing cold weather, citrus and vegetable growers in Central and South Florida prepared for what was expected to be the hardest freeze of the winter Sunday morning.

Florida Citrus Mutual in Lakeland planned an "all-night weather watch" and growers planned to stay in the fields watching the thermometer, ready to start firing when the situation became critical.

"The big concern in addition to the freeze and winds is the fact that trees in many locations have already got some bloom and a freeze would be real damaging. This is rather late for a hard freeze," a spokesman said.

Temperatures as low as 25 degrees were forecast for the citrus belt. The heavy seas sunk the tugboat Ice Fog, which was towing a 10-foot barge containing 2,300 tons of molasses. All eight crewmen were rescued by a Coast Guard cutter and a passing yacht.

The barge ran aground with its decks awash on Molasses Reef in John Pennekamp State Park, four miles off shore. The Florida Marine Patrol said the molasses was "gushing out" but the current was carrying it away from shore.

A spokesman said it had not been determined whether the water-soluble molasses would damage the reef and the underwater state park, frequented by divers and by tourists in glass bottom boats.

Lt. Tom Adams sent a distress signal from his 31-foot yawl "Sabre" Friday and the Coast Guard cutter Diligence took his boat in tow. He was a contestant in the St. Petersburg-to-Fort Lauderdale yacht race, which was interrupted by the squalls.

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to 34 degrees. Today's low was expected to break the record by several degrees.

High winds whipped the area, adding to the need for unearthen warm clothing. The chill factor caused by the wind was reported to be near 15 degrees.

Sarasota County Agricultural Agent Rollin McNutt said there was a strong possibility the cold would kill much of the early spring planting of tomatoes, regardless of precautions the growers made to save their crops from that planting.

The plummeting temperatures also created worries for flower growers. Commercial growers were "tuning up" for the cold late Saturday, McNutt said. Only four of the counties' citrus growers were equipped with pollution safe oil heaters. "A long cold spell could hurt us," he added.

Driving across the Siesta Key bridge Saturday one could see white caps caused by the high winds. The Coast Guard reported no trouble at sea Saturday because there were hardly any small craft going out in the rough, two-foot high waves.

Snow was reported as far south as Hudson, Fla. Sit and light snow were also reported near Tampa. If one can believe the snow reports in Sarasota, it all adds up to one thing . . . a very unusual, and very unwelcome "spell" of weather — especially if you're a northerner here in search of warm sunshine.